

SB487 An Act Establishing the Infant and Toddler Early Care and Family Support Initiative

To Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlan, members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, I am Executive Director of the YWCA New Britain and here to speak in support of SB487, An Act Establishing the Infant and Toddler Early Care and Family Support Initiative.

As one of New Britain's few providers with Infant/Toddler Childcare, I can attest the shortage of care for our youngest children has existed during my entire tenure at the YWCA (almost 40 years). In New Britain, a survey of childcare slots (both center and home daycare based) indicates only enough supply for 7 of every 100 children under age 3.

A fundamental issue regarding infant/toddler care is the cost of providing it. Given the vulnerability of very young children, a smaller teacher to child ratio is necessary, however, the tuition charged to parents is unable to support the full cost of the care. However, parents, particularly in low-income communities like New Britain, can't afford to pay more. To date, there have been no other resources to support this service.

Research on brain development substantiates that the largest amount of growth takes place in children under age 3. So much of a child's success rests on healthy development experienced during these early years. Children who experience trauma during this formative period also experience complete changes to brain development and interference to connectivity in the brain as a result. Access to high quality care and family stability are essential.

The expansion of care and support services to young children has been greatly hindered by the cost. The YWCA experiences a funding loss with each child served in this age group. We offer what we can, because our community needs us but can do no more without assistance. This exists despite teachers being paid \$15-20/hour.

In addition, current staffing shortages make infant/toddler care particularly challenging. Even those interested in early childhood education, are more reluctant to work with infants and toddlers. Outdated thinking about child development play a big part in this, as does the perception about professionalism in the field. These challenges are exacerbated by current shortages throughout the early childhood system. Quality care is equated to highly trained and educated staff. Given the historically low salaries afforded this work, highly educated individuals are not willing to enter the field. Currently, the YWCA has multiple classrooms closed as we can't find the qualified staff with the expertise needed to open them. We have always operated with a waiting list for

for every woman

infant/toddler care, many hundreds of children long. It is not an exaggeration to say, most children on that list are invited to participate in YWCA programming when they reach preschool.

This shortage of care particularly impacts women's ability to enter or re-enter the workforce after having a baby. For low-income communities, it further interferes with women's abilities to support their family economically.

Feedback from business owners and operators in our community indicate the shortage of care is having a ripple effect across many industries as they can't find employees. Not even those who are willing to train.

I believe that Family Childcare providers do have more flexibility and have been able to do this more cost effectively. The legislature last year past legislation that allowed for a few communities, including New Britain, to pilot a childcare business incubator which would support a cohort of family daycare providers. This would allow partners to support individuals who want to start their own family childcare business but currently have barriers (zoning regulations and landlords who don't want business run out of their property are two)

The legislation didn't come with funding. Funding this project through this funding and supporting providers through participation in subsidized program would ensure that those who enter this field would earn a sustainable wage.

SB487 would redirect existing tax revenue from the budget reserve to a new non-lapsing Early Care and Family Support account. Funds in this account would then be used to contract with childcare providers both centers and family childcare homes to increase the supply of high quality infant toddler care. Priority will be given to childcare providers in lower income childcare deserts. In order for us to be there for our communities, the reimbursement rate must be high enough to support our programs and at least \$400 weekly. Currently, the YWCA loses more than \$150,000 annually providing these services and that is with staff making \$15-\$20/hour.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Tracey Madden-Hennessey".

YWCA New Britain

Executive Director

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